

**The Theme of *The Tinkers' Wedding***

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**Abstract**

J. M. Synge (1871 – 1909) was the most highly esteemed playwright of the Irish literary renaissance, the movement in which such literary figures as William Butler Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory made their mark at the turn of the twentieth century. Although he died just short of his thirty-eighth birthday and produced a modest number of works, his writings have made an impact on audiences, writers, and Irish culture. Synge was an Irish poet and playwright. He participated in the founding of the Abbey Theatre. "The Tinker's wedding" is a two-act play by the Irish playwright J. M. Synge, whose main characters - as the title suggests - are Irish Tinkers. *The Tinker's Wedding* is a "comedy, rich, genial and humorous." It is set on a roadside near a chapel in rural Ireland and premiered 11 November 1909. Sarah Casey convinces the reluctant Michael Byrne to marry her by threatening to run off with another man. She accosts a local priest, and convinces him to wed them for ten shillings and a tin can. Michael's mother shows up drunk and harasses the priest and steals the can to exchange it for more drink. The next morning Sarah and Michael go to the chapel to be wed, but when the priest finds that the can is missing. He refuses to perform the ceremony. Sarah protests and a fight breaks out that ends with the priest tied up in a sack. The tinkers free him after he swears not to set the police after them and he curses them in God's name as they flee in mock terror.

**Key Words:** Irony, Humour, Satire and Symbols

**Introduction:**

J.M. Synge wrote "The Tinker's wedding" in order to impress the audience as a writer of comedy. It was not a legendary play but a folk play in only two acts. The production of the play was delayed by three years because of the doubt expressed by some directors and actors of Abbey theatre. It was thought so because of the play's satire on not only the Roman Catholic clergy but also on marriage sacrament

It is a two-act comedy set on the roadside near a chapel. Sarah convinces Michael to marry. She convinces the local priest to marry them for 10 shillings and a tin can.

When Michael's mother shows up she pesters the priest and steals the can. When the priest finds out what she has done he refuses to marry the couple. A fight breaks out and the Tinkers release the priest only after he promises not to call the police. The priest does however curse them as they are fleeing.

There is a similarity between Galsworthy's *Silver Box* and Synge's *Tinker's wedding*. In the *Silver Box*

Galsworthy shows how different the attitude of law was between two men. Both of them drink and commit theft. One of them is the son of a wealthy liberal M.P. The other is an

unemployed man. The M.P.'s goes free where as the unemployed man is sent to jail. Similarly the church authority wants to exploit in the marriage sacrament of Michael Byrne and Sarah Casey.

Synge's third play of that fertile summer, *The Tinker's Wedding*, became the least distinguished of his mature works. He completed one act in the fall or early winter of 1903, and later expanded it to a second act. It is a farce, set among the tinkers of Wicklow—vagrants who travel the land, begging, making things to sell, and, according to Synge's essay "The Vagrants of Wicklow," swapping spouses. The play's leading characters are Sarah Casey, who wants to marry her boyfriend in spite of the unorthodoxy of such an ambition from the tinker point of view; Michael Byrne, the boyfriend, who is skeptical but willing to marry; and Michael's mother, Mary, a drunkard who derides the idea of marriage. A priest agrees to marry Michael and Sarah on the condition that they make him a tin can. When they deliver him a bundle, which they believe contains the can, they find that Mary has stolen it and replaced it with empty bottles. In the play's climax, the tinker couple binds, gag, and threaten the priest for inhumanity.

Recognizing that this would make the play almost impossible to produce on a Dublin stage, Synge offered it to publishers in London and Berlin and finally publishing it with Maunsel and Company in 1908. The play was not performed in the author's lifetime, and he was never quite satisfied with its literary quality. Most critics were also unimpressed with this Synge's play. When it premiered in England on November

11, 1909, Yeats left after the first act. In the summer of 1902 Synge achieved a new level of accomplishment. Staying at his mother's rented house in Wicklow, he drafted three plays: *Riders to the Sea*, *In the Shadow of the Glen*, and *The Tinker's Wedding*. In these plays are found the rich spoken language of the Irish peasant characters who dominate Synge's mature works

Although Synge did not conceive *Riders to the Sea*, *In the Shadow of the Glen*, and *The Tinker's Wedding* to be a trilogy, thematic similarities are not hard to find. In *The Writings of J. M. Synge*, Skelton treats the three as a loosely connected trilogy, finding "conflict between folk belief and conventional Christian attitudes. In all three we are shown a woman trapped by circumstances, and in each one we are presented with a different aspect of her predicament." Skelton later continued, "As we proceed from *Riders to the Sea*, through *In the Shadow of the Glen* to *The Tinker's Wedding*, the age of the central female character diminishes and the psychological complexity of the drama increases."

J. M. Synge burst on to the scene in 1903 when his first play *The Shadow of the Glen* caused a stir among audiences and critics alike during its opening run in Dublin. Over the next two years Synge produced another two plays: *Riders to the Sea* (1904), which is considered to be one of the greatest one-act plays in the history of modern drama; and *The Well of the Saints* (1905) which celebrates the imagination and heroism of the dissident who refuses to be coerced into conformity at the behest of the moral

majority. Synge may well have drawn on the lessons of the latter play when in 1907 he became notorious as the author of *The Playboy of the Western World* which caused riots in the Abbey Theatre and brought his work to the attention of the wider world for the first time. Two other plays, *The Tinker's Wedding* written in 1907 and *Deirdre of the Sorrows* staged posthumously in 1910 complete the canon of Synge's plays.

**Conclusion:**

"The Tinker's wedding" is a satire on the Roman clergy and marriage sacrament. It gives us a new expression not only to jollity and fun but also to incongruities and mannerism of the Roman Catholic clergyman. Howe pointed out "Synge's astonishingly certain sense of the theatre; his command of a dialogue apt and pointed for comedy, and capable at the same time of every effect of increased intensity; the racy clearness of the characterization, and personality of the whole work."

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